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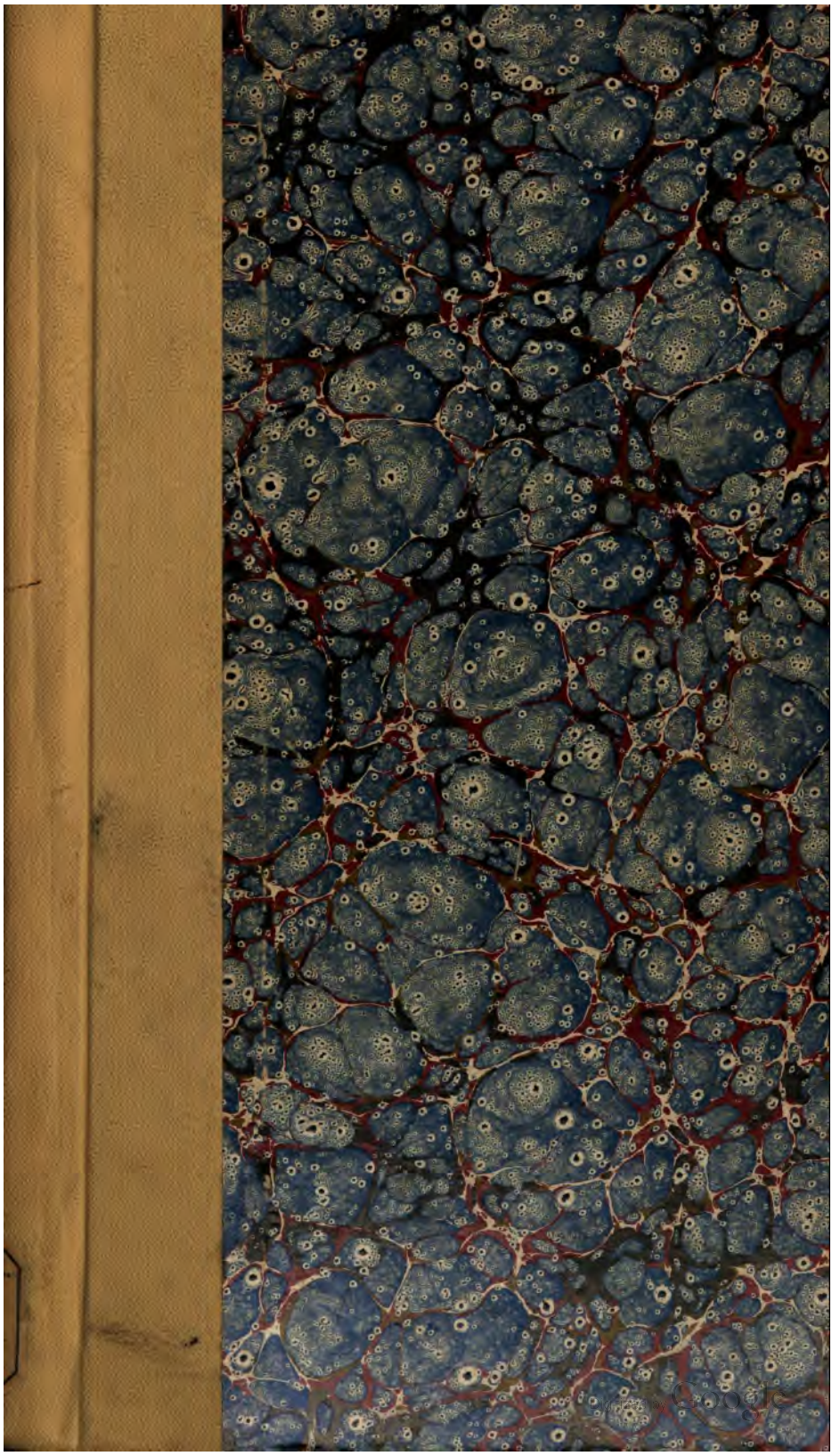

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Dr. Harvey Willson Harkness

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Born May 25, 1821
Died July 10, 1901

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Harkness Memorial.

San Francisco, April 17th, 1905.

To the California Academy of Sciences:

Your Committee appointed "to prepare a suitable memorial of respect to the memory of Dr. H. W. Harkness, a former president of the Academy," respectfully begs leave to present the following.

Theodore H. Hittell,
Lucius H. Foote,
Committee.

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In Memory of President Harkness.

In the death of Dr. Harvey Willson Harkness, who died in this city on July 10, 1901, at the age of a little over eighty years, this Academy lost one of its most active and efficient members. He belonged to that hardy race of men, now rapidly disappearing from the face of the earth, known and famed as the California Pioneers. He was born on May 25, 1821, at the town of Pelham, Massachusetts, of American parents, who derived their descent from Scottish ancestors. Their means were limited and their family large; and Harvey, who was the seventh child, was, like the others, obliged during his youthful years to work upon the paternal farm in summer time, though in winter he found opportunity to attend the best public schools that were accessible and acquire the rudiments of a good education.

He early manifested a strong inclination for learning; but, on account of the position in life into which he was born, he was compelled to maintain a long and, it may be said, an almost desperate struggle against adverse circumstances, the results partly of poverty and partly of a hereditary tendency to the fell disease, consumption, which threw a shadow of melancholy over his disposition and left their scars upon his character. By care and energy and persistence, however, he triumphed in the struggle; and, having turned his attention to the study of medicine, he received his degree as a physician and surgeon at the Berkshire Medical College of Massachusetts in 1847, at the age of twenty-six.

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The next year after his graduation, news reached the East of the discovery of gold in the western foothills of the Sierra Nevada, producing an unparalleled excitement throughout the country, particularly among young men of vigor and enterprise who were seeking a career; and the young doctor, the following spring, joined that mighty overland emigration that crossed the continent, making one of a party that started from Rock Island, Illinois, and reached California in October, 1849. He settled first at Bidwell's Bar and commenced there the practice of his profession; but in 1850 he moved to Sacramento, where he remained in busy and lucrative professional occupation for nineteen years. In 1854 he married Miss Amelia Griswold; but his wife died in less than a year after their union; and her loss left him with a still deeper tinge of melancholy than he had brought with him from his earlier life.

In 1869, at the age of forty-eight, he gave up regular business and retired with a well-earned competence. In the course of his residence at Sacramento he became acquainted and connected in friendly relations with the builders of the western half of the first Transcontinental Railroad; and the friendships, thus initiated, lasted during the lives of those of them who remained in California. On May 10, 1869, he assisted at the ceremony of laying the last rail at Promontory and was chosen to present, on behalf of the State of California, the golden spike used upon that occasion. After his retirement from practice, he spent most of his time in San Francisco, where he finally became a permanent resident; but in the meanwhile he made a number of visits to the Eastern States; four to Europe, and two to Egypt and Northern Africa. On November 17, 1869, he was present, as an invited guest of the Viceroy of Egypt, at the opening of the Suez Canal.

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He took an early and active interest at Sacramento in the cause of the public schools and was elected in 1853 the first president of the Sacramento Board of Education. A memorial of his connection with the educational department there remains in the name of the Harkness Grammar School, which he did much to establish. He also devoted much time and study to science, but confined his attention more particularly to the lower cryptogamic plants, and chiefly to the fungi of the Pacific Coast. On September 4, 1871, he was elected a regular member of this Academy. In January, 1879, he was elected first vice-president and served for that year. In January, 1884, he was again elected first vice-president, and on the same day was chosen an honorary life member. In January, 1885, he was for the third time elected first vice-president, and at the end of that year nominated to fill the same office for 1886; but a contest took place, and he was defeated at the polls. In January, 1887, coming forward with greater strength, he was elected president; and he continued to fill that office, by repeated annual re-elections, for nine years and up to January, 1896.

As a member of the Academy, and especially after he became its president, he devoted most of his time to promoting its interests and the cause of science for which it was founded. He attended strictly to the duties of his office; was seldom absent from a meeting, and presided with dignity and decorum. Though he had little or nothing to do with the original donation of our great benefactor, James Lick, he had much to do in the economical administration of that benefaction; and he exerted considerable influence in securing the large and generous donations of Charles Crocker, Leland Stanford, and Mrs. E. B. Crocker. It was almost, if not entirely, due to him that we received the liberal Pierce bequest and several others. The Academy is also indebted to him for its

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large collection of fungi as well as many other of its valuable scientific stores.

It may justly be said of him that he was an active, efficient and devoted assistant of the Academy in its transition from its dark days to its flourishing condition; from its chrysalis state to its present prosperous activity. It was during his incumbency as president that this fine building, in which we meet, was designed, erected and dedicated as the home of science in this great metropolis of the Pacific Coast. He placed its corner-stone, and gratuitously labored with a sort of fatherly superintending interest over every part of its construction, watching with jealous inspection every brick that was laid and every trowel that was handled in its building. And when it was completed, it was he, more perhaps than any other, that directed and guarded the careful removal and transportation of its treasures from the dark, dingy, dusty and dilapidated old quarters on Dupont Street to the bright, airy and well-kept galleries above us.

For all this, and for many other acts of gratuitous attention, solicitude and devotion to its interests, both as a member and for many years its efficient president, the California Academy of Sciences owes to him a deep debt of gratitude.

THEODORE H. HITTELL.

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